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6 May 2024

§ 9(2)(a)

By email: § 9(2)(a)
Ref: H2024040314

Tēnā koe § 9(2)(a)

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) on 25 April 2024 for information regarding Long Covid. You requested:

- “1) To date, since the beginning of the covid pandemic, how many people have been diagnosed with suffering from long covid?”*
- 2) How many of these people have reviewed at least one covid-19 vaccination?”*

The Ministry of Health does not record Long Covid statistics. We have also consulted with Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora who advised the same. As there is no requirement under the Act for agencies to create new information or compile information that is not part of the usual reporting process, your request is therefore refused under section 18(g) of the Act as the information requested is not held by the Ministry and there are no grounds for believing it is held by another agency subject to the Act.

Long COVID is still a relatively new condition and our ability to understand, identify and support people with Long COVID is still evolving. The Ministry continues to assess the impact of Long COVID via funded research and put in place the steps for gathering data through the use of new clinical codes which will over time enable a clearer understanding to be built.

Currently the best pathway for people with Long COVID to access care is as they would for other chronic conditions, through their GP, who can refer them on to specialist care if required. Because Long COVID can present with a wider variety of symptoms, the specialist care required will vary from patient to patient.

In September 2022, we released the first long COVID guidelines for health professionals, individuals and those caring for people with long COVID, adding to the growing number of resources available around the condition. These guidelines were updated in December 2022 to reflect the most current evidence.

The guidelines look at the options for care available to people with the condition; they give advice to health professionals on what to look for when diagnosing long COVID and what resources are available to people to manage those symptoms. As there is no known cure for long COVID, the focus on the guidelines is identification, assessment, diagnosis, interventions, supports and care pathways for rehabilitation of individuals with the condition.

In August 2022, the Ministry introduced new clinical codes for long COVID. The clinical codes will allow for classification of an individual's diagnosis and over time this will allow us to build a clearer picture of the impact of the condition in New Zealand. The Ministry expects to begin reporting on long COVID conditions in 2024, once there is regular use of the code allowing this information to be tracked.

The Ministry has recently commissioned a number of research projects looking at long COVID:

- *An Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa* study, run by Victoria University of Wellington which aims to understand the experiences of people in New Zealand who have had COVID-19 and to learn about the short- and longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of individuals, whānau and families. There is a particular focus on key subgroups including Māori, Pacific people, people with disabilities (including long COVID), and people who developed COVID-19 through their employment. The outcomes of the study will be used to advise health officials.
- LOGIC study: LONG term health Impact of COVID-19: Waikato Hospital Cohort
- *Burden of Long COVID in Aotearoa New Zealand: Establishing a Registry*, University of Auckland. This work will help establish a long COVID registry and with that estimates of the clinical, quality of life and economic impacts of long COVID in Aotearoa New Zealand, plus provide a means to continually monitor health outcomes and inequities. The final report summary is expected next week.

The Ministry is otherwise preparing for a more formal handover of Long Covid management to Health New Zealand in order to align with the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: oiagr@health.govt.nz.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā



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